



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

March 22, 2012

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Northwest
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We were delighted that we were able to reach an agreement last year to reauthorize the highly successful D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) by including the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Act in the Fiscal Year 2011 Department of Defense and Full Year Continuing Appropriations Act (P.L. 112-10). We want to express our continued strong interest in the effective implementation of this program, and to share with you the attached letter that was sent to Secretary Arne Duncan.

Mr. President, we believe the D.C. OSP is a critically important part of K-12 education in the District of Columbia. Participating families have an average income of less than \$24,000 per year and more than 92 percent of participating students would otherwise be in a school in need of improvement. You have articulately highlighted our nation's severe dropout crisis, and the Opportunity Scholarship Program right here in Washington, D.C. is a shining example of one tool to help address the crisis. According to the most recent Institute of Education Sciences (IES) report, 91 percent of students who used their opportunity scholarships graduated high school, which was 21 percent higher than those who applied but were not awarded a scholarship. In fact, the OSP has the second highest achievement impact of any of the programs studied so far by the IES.

Since its inception in 2004, more than 10,000 families have applied to participate in the program. Four years of studies conducted by Georgetown University and the University of Arkansas showed very high parental satisfaction. Four years of polling have also showed strong support among city residents, including the February 2011 poll by Lester & Associates that showed 74 percent of D.C. residents supported reauthorization.

In light of the success of the program and its formal reauthorization, we were very disappointed that your proposed fiscal year 2013 budget request failed to include funding for the OSP program. As you know, the SOAR Act authorizes \$60 million for the D.C. OSP, D.C. public charter schools, and D.C. public schools. The Act specifies that the amount appropriated is to be

allocated equally amongst these three sectors. We will work to ensure that the funds are so appropriated.

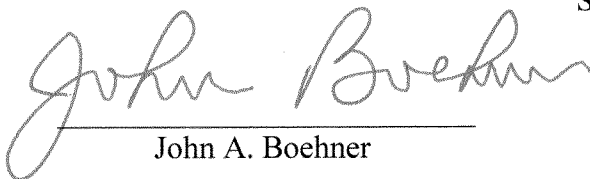
We also take issue with your budget justification, which suggests that current unobligated funds are sufficient to fund current students and new students who may receive scholarships as spaces open up through attrition. In our view, as co-authors of the SOAR Act, the Act reauthorizes a robust 5-year program and does not cap the number of students who are able to receive scholarships. Current enrollment levels are significantly below OSP enrollment at its peak. We hope you will reconsider your budget request, and work with Congress to fully fund the D.C. OSP and allocate funding for the three-sector approach to education reform as specified in law.

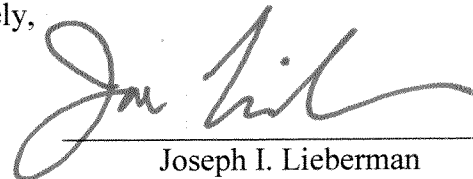
In order to ensure the effective implementation of the Act, we hope the full amount of administrative funds is distributed to the D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (the Trust) in a timely manner. It is our understanding that, pursuant to Title III, Section 3012, Transition Provisions of the SOAR Act (P.L. 112-10), an estimated \$1,000,000 of previously appropriated funds should be available -for administrative and family support costs to allow the Trust to immediately accelerate the process to renew scholarships for existing OSP students, and process and accept new applications. In addition to these funds, the SOAR Act entitles the Trust to 3 percent of appropriations to run the program and an additional 2 percent of the total for family support activities – for each school year.

We note that in a very short period of time, the Trust's OSP unit successfully renewed the scholarships for 900 students and processed 1,558 new applications, which resulted in a total enrollment of 1,615 students as of October 3, 2012, for the 2011-2012 school year. We would like to see this process continued and would urge your Administration to provide the technical assistance necessary for a successful expansion of the program. We are also pleased that a request for proposal was recently issued for the congressionally mandated study. We hope that this process moves quickly, and we look forward to reviewing the results of the continuing evaluations. It is important to have a strong and viable applicant pool for both the control and study groups.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


John A. Boehner


Joseph I. Lieberman

Enclosure